



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP - REVIEW

February 2022 Meeting

by Margaret Patterson

“The First Pharaohs”

Aidan Dodson

At the beginning of February 2022 Aidan Dodson

(<https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/persons/aidan-m-dodson>)

gave a talk to us about the topic of his most recent book – “The First Pharaohs”

(<https://smile.amazon.co.uk/First-Pharaohs-Their-Lives-Afterlives/dp/1649030932/>). He noted

that the use of “Pharaoh” in this title might be seen as anachronistic because the Egyptians didn't use the term we translate as pharaoh for their kings until the New Kingdom. However it's now become the standard English word we use for kings of Egypt in general hence why he's sticking to it!

He began by setting the scene – the subject of the talk was to be the very earliest kings of Egypt from the time of unification through to the end of the 3rd Dynasty and the beginning of the 4th Dynasty. There were two main themes to his talk. Firstly, this era can be seen as the prototype era of Egyptian history – lots of things that persist throughout the history of ancient Egypt can be seen to have their origins in this period. And secondly, it's a difficult period to sort out historically – there are lots of gaps in the evidence so working out who reigned when, and in what order, can be problematic. We know a surprising amount given how long ago this was, but not nearly enough to have a full picture of the period.

Of course the first Pharaohs didn't appear from nowhere, so Dodson began much further back to give us a feel for where they came from. His starting point was the Nabta Playa where around 5000 BCE a stone circle was erected (which has now been transplanted to the Nubian Museum in Aswan). It's the first monumental structure in Egypt that has been identified. Presumably it was aligned to some astronomical phenomenon, as is the case for most stone circles that have been discovered, but we can only guess as to what its function was.

So this was 2000 years before unification, and in the period between that stone circle and the unification of Egypt there are various cultures that live in both northern and southern Egypt. The southern ones are the best known – for instance the various Nagada cultures, with their distinctive pottery like black-topped red ware or decorated ware. The latter of these cultures comes right close to the point of unification – 3000 BCE ± a century or so (as Dodson pointed out, the chronology is a bit vague this far back in time and not everyone agrees on the precise dates).

As far as it's possible to trace the pre-unification history of Egypt Dodson says that there seems to be a gradual grouping together of polities in the south, eventually forming a kingdom. Hierakonpolis is the key city for this, and will have a brief return to prominence later on. It's at Hierakonpolis that we start to see stratification of society via their burials – a new phenomenon from the late 4th millennium

onward. For instance tomb 23 in the HK6 cemetery of Hierakonpolis is much larger and excavation has revealed evidence (from things like post holes) that there was a sunken burial chamber with a wooden superstructure and a fence enclosing the whole thing (Renée Friedman talked to us about this cemetery in September last year, see my write up here:

<https://writeups.talesfromthetwolands.org/2021/09/17/life-on-the-edge-updates-from-hierakonpolis-elite-cemetery-renee-friedman/>.

Dodson pointed out that this superstructure probably looked a lot like the mudbrick superstructures of later tombs – the architectural design of which looks like it owes a lot to original perishable material structures (a theme which returns later in this talk). At Hierakonpolis there is also the famous Painted Tomb (aka Tomb 100) which is also an example of some graves being much richer than others and demonstrating a stratification of society into elite and non-elite.

This immediately pre-unification period also has the earliest examples of colossal statues from ancient Egypt – the examples that Dodson showed us were the colossal statues of Min originally found at Koptos. Two of these are now at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and one is in Cairo Museum. These are known to've been standing at the time of Narmer, because his name has been added to them. But from the style it seems clear that they are older than that. These statues are also some of the earliest evidence we have for the god Min who is venerated throughout Pharaonic Egyptian history. Other deities are also first seen during this period. Dodson also showed us some smaller artwork from the period – a small statue from Tell Farkha.

As well as Hierakonpolis the other key site where we find evidence of the transition to dynastic Egypt is Abydos. The cemeteries at this site have burials right the way through from pre-unification until the Roman period. At the western extremity of the Abydos necropolis is a site called Umm el-Qaab, which is the cemetery of the 1st and 2nd Dynasty kings and also includes burials of high status individuals from before unification. The most impressive of these earlier burials is Tomb U-j. It's cut into the ground, and there are several rooms inside with subdivisions made of mudbrick – a burial chamber surrounded by storehouses. Dodson said it's definitely predynastic, but how far before unification is debated. From finds made while it was excavated it was the burial of a king called Scorpion but whether that's the one from just before unification (to whom Dodson would return a few slides later) or another earlier one is unknown. Radiocarbon dating might seem to be the way forward, but the dates they have been able to measure are spread pretty widely so don't narrow it down much. There are also some known problems with radiocarbon dating for this time period due to limitations of the technique, and it is known to sometimes give wrong answers (like putting objects in the wrong order based on other evidence).

Another instantly recognisable type of artwork from the late Predynastic period are decorated palettes, and Dodson showed us some of these alongside a knife handle found at Gebel el Arak. These all have similarities in their art, and while some of the motifs do transfer into dynastic Egypt many don't survive past the end of the 1st Dynasty. There are also a lot of Mesopotamian parallels to the motifs on these pieces, which has caused a lot of debate on exactly how the Mesopotamian and Egyptian states interacted. Did objects and people move between the two? Or was it an exchange of ideas? Dodson also pointed out that this art is full of scenes of hunting and of warfare – it gives one a sense of a period of fairly long term conflict before the unification of Egypt.



It's right around the time of the unification of Egypt that we start to find more "typically" Egyptian art. The example Dodson showed us is the Scorpion macehead, which has a depiction of a king with some of the canonical iconography that is familiar from later Egyptian kingship. And also the typical perspective of later Egyptian art, etc. This may be the same individual who was buried in Tomb U-j that Dodson discussed earlier.

The key artwork to do with the unification of Egypt is, of course, the Narmer palette which was found at Hierakonpolis. There have been various attempts to analyse the art on it in symbolic ways, but Dodson says he thinks it difficult to get away from the original fairly straightforward interpretation that this is a commemoration of an actual event in the unification process. On one side the king wears the white crown which is later associated with Upper Egypt, on the other he wears the red crown that is later associated with

Upper Egypt. And there are motifs of violence and conquering – there is a sense of the Horus king capturing the marsh country, he is of course smiting an enemy on one of the faces. This all suggests a violent act of unification. Some of these motifs hark back to the early palettes that Dodson had just shown us – there's a bull demolishing a city which is a motif from one of those palettes too, and the long necked beasts also show up in predynastic art. The rest, however, is purely Egyptian iconography and the smiting scene in particular is a motif that carries on through future Egyptian history right up until the time of the Roman Emperor Nero!

Dodson said that Abydos is crucial for our understanding of the 1st Dynasty kings. All of the tombs of the 1st Dynasty kings are at Abydos – the burial elements are at Umm el-Qaab as he'd mentioned earlier and there are associated funerary enclosures near the desert edge some distance from the tombs. These enclosures appear to have been used at the funerary ceremony but not thereafter, as they were each dismantled before the next one was built. So Dodson says he sees these spaces as where the initial funerary ceremonies were carried out, before the body of the deceased king was transferred the 2km to the tomb at Umm el-Qaab at which point more ceremonies would be carried out. And then the enclosure would be taken down and a new one would begin construction for the new king. These enclosures appear a consistent feature of the 1st Dynasty (and those 2nd Dynasty burials at Abydos) royal funerary structures – there's a known structure for all but two kings and the ones that are missing seem to be a question of preservation rather than an indication that they didn't have one.

He showed us the map of the remains of these funerary enclosures – the earliest definitely datable one belongs to the king called Aha. To the north of this is the remains of a bit of wall that might be where Narmer's enclosure was. Two have no names associated – one of these had associated donkey burials, and another we

refer to as the "western mastaba". This latter had boat burials next to it which is another feature of this early period of kingship that carries on into the pyramid age (such as the solar boats that were found near Khufu's pyramid). The last funerary enclosure is called (in modern times) Shunet el-Zebib, and it belonged to the last king of the 2nd Dynasty. Parts of the walls still stand to 30m tall, some four and a half thousand years after it was built. It still stands simply because he was the last king to be buried at Abydos in this fashion – so it didn't need to be taken down before a successor's was built. Inside the enclosure there are no signs of contemporary long lasting structures – everything seems to have been temporary and made of perishable vegetable/plant materials. There is one mudbrick structure in the middle, which was once interpreted as contemporary and as being some sort of proto-pyramid but more recent work has made it clear that this is a much much later ibis pool for sacred animals.

The tombs at Umm el-Qaab start out really simple in design and become more elaborate with time. For instance it is only in the reign of Den that they begin to have entrance stairways, before this the only way the tomb could be entered was through the ceiling. This meant that these structures were only roofed once the tomb storerooms were filled and the burial chamber was occupied. The later tombs also had more elaborate sets of chambers, and the tomb of Qaa (the last of the 1st Dynasty) was the first tomb to have some stone elements in its construction.

Dodson now showed us a model of the tomb of Djet so we could see how the excavators think it would have looked when it was newly constructed. It would have had a ceiling made of wooden beams to hold up the sand that would be heaped over it. Because of the size of the ceiling these were most likely imported wood. All the tombs were probably covered with a tumulus (a mound) but there is no longer any evidence for what the superstructures were like so this is just the best guess. At one side of each tomb a pair of stelae was set up which flanked the place where the offerings to the royal cult were to be performed. This practice is another one that continues through to the time of Sneferu at the beginning of the 4th Dynasty.

Although the tombs had been severely robbed over the millennia since the burials were made there have still been some finds. Dodson showed us a few little ivory labels that have been found – this includes one of king Den smiting enemies with text referring to the smiting of the Eastern enemies. Another label refers to the king's *heb sed* festival – another part of royal practice and iconography that begins in this period and continues throughout Egyptian history until the Ptolemaic Period. These labels have text on them as well as the images, and Dodson said there's a sense that the written language is developing here in front of our eyes. Another find that Dodson showed us was a seal which shows the king running alongside the Apis Bull – another reference to the *heb sed* and showing us the ancient origins of the Apis bull.

The stelae that were set up outside the tombs have also been found, and give the names of these kings – each one has the name of the king in a *serekh* topped by a falcon. They came in pairs as he said earlier, and they were set up so that the two falcons faced each other (and the offering place). Dodson showed us a selection of these stelae which included one that's not got the *serekh* and falcon motif. This was Merneith's stela, who was the mother of Den. It seems she acted as regent in her son's minority – her son had a reign of around 50 years, and his predecessor has a short reign. So this looks like the classic situation of a queen being regent for a young son, but unlike in later cases she's commemorated in her burial almost like a king. The only apparent difference is that her stelae don't have the kingly iconography of the falcon.

The contemporary conception of kingship in this early period is underlined in the tombs of Djer and Djet where the king is accompanied by vast numbers of sacrificed retainers. Dodson told us that it's known that they were sacrificed (or died, or suicided) at the point of burial because the whole structure had to be roofed over in one go – the practice begins before entrance stairs were added to tombs. There's a mix of people buried in this way, including both men and women. Interestingly a number of other early civilisations have this feature of human sacrifice – for instance Ur in Mesopotamia as well as others more distant. The numbers involved always seem to drop off really quickly, so in the case of Egypt there are hundreds of sacrificed people buried with Djer but by the time of Khasekhemwy at the end of the 2nd Dynasty there are only two such burials. And after this there is no further evidence of human sacrifice accompanying the king's burial.

Another feature of early kingship that does carry through into later periods of Egyptian history is activity in two key foreign spheres. There is evidence during the 1st Dynasty of Egyptian activity in the Sinai. And there is also evidence for them pushing south at Gebel Sheikh Soliman – there is a relief of one of the 1st Dynasty kings fighting (and winning) in Nubia.

Prior to unification the centre of gravity was in the south, but after unification the kings quickly realised that if they were to effectively rule the whole territory then they needed to move the centre of power further north. Dodson said this was to remain a key point throughout Egyptian history – even if there were religious centres of power in the south or even if the country was re-unified from the south, political and administrative power still moved north for effective governance. Memphis was founded soon after unification for this purpose, and was to remain the practical capital of the country regardless of other ideological centres.

Saqqara is the Early Dynastic necropolis near Memphis. It's a really visible location from Memphis – they are "tombs with a view" on the top of an escarpment with the occupants overlooking Memphis where they lived their lives. And the people of the city could look up at these impressive whitewashed tombs on the skyline. In the 1950s they were thought to be royal tombs but Dodson said that nowadays they are known to belong to the high elite of the country, the officials who ran it from Memphis. The 1st Dynasty tombs took all the best places on the escarpment so the later ones spill down the slopes away from Memphis towards the area where the Step Pyramid will be built generations later. The 2nd Dynasty also marks the point from which royal tombs are built at Saqqara. They are placed at the bottom of the slope, on the plateau there – and later they were built over by the 5th Dynasty tombs like the pyramid of Unas. These tombs are also accompanied by funerary enclosures, which seem a little oddly placed when thinking about the site from a modern perspective – they seem to be "behind" the tombs and out in the desert rather than on the way to them like the Abydos ones are. However this is not the case, during this period the "way in" to the Saqqara necropolis was from the north along the bottom of a wadi. So the approach to the tombs would've gone past the enclosures before proceeding on to the tombs.

There's a statue of a man called Hetepdief now in Cairo, which gives the names of the first three kings of the 2nd Dynasty. The first of these is Hetepsekhemwy, and his tomb at Saqqara is now almost underneath the pyramid of Unas. As a result of this later reuse of the area we have no idea what the superstructures of his (and other 2nd Dynasty kings') tombs looked like. The substructure is more clear, however. The geology of Saqqara is quite different to that of Abydos and so it was possible for these kings to cut their tomb chambers and passages into the bedrock rather than needing to build subterranean buildings out of mudbrick or stone. Hetepsekhemwy's tomb consists of a series of corridors with lots of long storage chambers opening off them – it's very neatly laid out, with right angle corners and straight even lines of chambers.

The next king is called Raneb and Dodson said we have very little evidence for him. There is one of his tomb stela in the Met in New York, so he was definitely a real king. But sadly that stela was bought on the art market and not excavated by someone who recorded where it came from, so we have no idea where his tomb was. His successor Ninetjer was buried at Saqqara – his tomb has a similar layout to Hetepsekemwy's but it's much less neat and tidy. The corridors and chambers are much more higgledy-piggledy. The first known 3D representation of a king is a statue of Ninetjer now in Leiden. He's in jubilee robes so this indicates he celebrated a *heb sed* festival and must have had a reasonably long reign.

After that Dodson said it gets very vague and problematic. There's definitely a Sened and a Peribsen, and from the doorway of a tomb from Saqqara we know one priest celebrated both their funerary cults. This might suggest their tombs were at Saqqara, but whilst we don't know where Sened's is we do know that Peribsen's was at Umm el-Qaab again. This tomb looks a lot like the 1st Dynasty tombs, which is probably not an ideological choice but rather a practical choice driven by the differing geology of the sites – the corridors and chambers in the bedrock style is just not possible at Abydos. Peribsen's stela survive and are particularly interesting. Instead of a Horus falcon on top of the *serekh* there is a (now erased) figure of the god Seth. What exactly that means is much debated. Later Egyptian legend has Horus and Seth as enemies which makes a Seth king following on from a Horus king intriguing. Is this evidence of conflict that turns into the later myths and stories? However the presence of the Seth king Peribsen's tomb at Abydos – the centre later of the worship of Osiris whom Seth kills in the myths – and also that Peribsen's cult lasts until the 4th Dynasty suggest that he's not the leader of some sort of anti-Horus insurrection. But possibly following him there's some sort of civil war? Dodson speculated that perhaps Peribsen's successors take the idea of Seth as the new kingly iconography and run with it in opposition to Horus.

That something is going on is seen in later kings lists. These are compiled in much later times such as the New Kingdom or later still by Manetho (in his talk to the EEG last year about Sethy I, Dodson talked a bit more about the New Kingdom kings lists; see my write up:

<https://writeups.talesfromthetwolands.org/2020/06/12/sethy-i-king-of-egypt-aidan-dodson/>.

Interpretation of these can be difficult – during the Early Dynastic period kings were referred to by their Horus names and may well not have had throne names, but later kings are always referred to using their throne names. So the people who made the later kings lists often made up throne names to write in the cartouches for these early kings, which can make it a bit difficult to match the later records with the contemporary records for a given kings. These king lists disagree for the end of the 2nd Dynasty – the Abydos king list of Sethy I has no-one between Sened and Khasekhemwy, but the Saqqara and Turin lists have names in that gap (but not the same names in each text). To add to the confusion one of the names is actually a word that translates to something like "lacuna" or "missing". So this means a scribe somewhere along the line misunderstood the signs and thought they were a name, so copied them out into a cartouche just like all the other kings!



Statue of Khasekhemwy

There is also evidence from physical artifacts associated with Khasekhemwy that indicate he "won" over other parts of the country. For instance there are two statues of him (one in the Ashmolean, one in Cairo) which have slain enemies and a text listing how many there were on the base of the statue. There is also evidence from his funerary enclosure – not the one at Abydos that is eventually used. He has another one at Hierakonpolis, and Dodson said there's a suggestion that he began construction of this one early in his reign when he didn't have access to (or control of) Saqqara or Abydos and so couldn't plan to be buried in one of those two more traditional places. And then when he retakes control of Abydos he begins construction of the Shunet el-Zebib there and converts his Hierakonpolis enclosure into a jubilee structure for his *heb sed*. Khasekhemwy also did

quite a bit of building work at Hierakonpolis, and evidence of this has been found at the temple at this site. One block from here has Khasekhemwy's name surrounded by a *serekh* topped by both Horus and Seth. His name also changes from Khasekhem earlier in his reign to Khasekhemwy – from "Appearance of Power" to "Appearance of Two Powers". He also adds an epithet that references two powers. So this all rather suggests that he won a civil war and that he decided on a policy of reconciliation, at least in his iconography.

Khasekhemwy was the last king to be buried at Abydos in this early period. As Dodson mentioned earlier in the talk the funerary enclosure of Khasekhemwy still stands (as the Shunet el-ZEBIB) and it is from this one that we learn what the walls of the enclosure were actually like. They have the sort of panelled facade that's often referred to as a palace facade motif and is used iconographically as the *serekh* around the king's name. This motif has been used to argue for direct contact with Mesopotamia during this period – this is the style of Mesopotamian temple walls at or before the same period when the Egyptians start using it for palace walls.

We also have the tomb of Khasekhemwy's wife, so we know who she is and that she was the mother of the next king. She was called Nimaathap, and she was buried at Beit Khallaf (a little to the north of Abydos). Pre-burial references to her give her the title Mother of the King's Children, but it appears she was buried in her son's reign as in her tomb she is referred to as King's Mother.

This son was almost certainly Djoser, the first king of the 3rd Dynasty. Later kings lists add an extra king between Khasekhemwy and Djoser, but this appears to be an error and this other king reigns later on in the dynasty. Dodson explained that a big reason for thinking that Djoser is the direct successor of Khasekhemwy is that the

seals on food containers in Khasekhemwy's tomb name Djoser as the reigning king. So this indicates that Djoser provisioned the tomb, and that is usually the act of the son/successor for his father/predecessor.

So in one sense there seems to be continuity between Khasekhemwy and his son Djoser, but there is a sense of a break here. Manetho makes Djoser the first of the 3rd Dynasty, and even writes his name in red ink (uniquely amongst the kings). One thing that seems to be changing is that we start to find longer literary texts, and Dodson showed us some examples from Djoser's reign from Heliopolis. Of course the most prominent surviving artifact from the reign of Djoser is the Step Pyramid. It's wholly made of stone which was an innovation, and seen by the Egyptians as the start of something new.

The Step Pyramid also combines the two elements of previous royal tombs into a single monument – the enclosure now surrounds the tomb. Because the dummy buildings inside the Step Pyramid enclosure were made of stone they help up to understand what would have been inside the earlier funerary enclosures but has vanished because it was made of perishable materials. The stone structures themselves are clearly modelled architecturally on structures built with vegetable materials. The pyramid itself evolved through a series of phases – at first it was a low square structure, then it was expanded into a 4 step pyramid and finally the 6 step one that we see today. Underneath the pyramid is the burial chamber – the walls, ceiling and floor of this have been destroyed, all that remains is the stone chest in which his body would have been laid. From fragments that remain we know that the ceiling would have been decorated with stars like much later royal tombs, another piece of continuity between this early period and later royal structures and art. The interior corridors have images of the king running as part of the *heb sed* festival, and Dodson noted that this festival seems to feature heavily in the king's funerary ritual. He speculated that at first it was a purely funerary thing that was moved into life as well. However he continued by pointing out that it could as easily be the other way round, and we really don't have evidence to tell which way it happened. But it does seem clear that there's a link between the funerary practices of the king and the *heb sed*. Dodson also pointed out that this is the first time the king is depicted in his tomb chambers, and also the last until the New Kingdom!

Another thing we know from the reign of Djoser is that a man called Imhotep is the one credited with learning to build in stone. This was only known from much later sources, but then a base from a statue of Djoser was discovered (now in the Imhotep Museum) which had Imhotep's name and titles on it. This link between a king (the statue) and a man is really extremely unusual so this indicates he was very prominent in life. His tomb is unknown, but Dodson speculates that it might be tomb S3518 at Saqqara. This tomb dates to the reign of Djoser, and its orientation is a bit odd compared to other tombs in the same area. It's one of only a handful that is oriented to match the Step Pyramid so this suggests that it is someone associated strongly with that structure. Underneath the tomb is a much later sacred animal necropolis – dedicated to Thoth with whom Imhotep is associated.

After Djoser the chronology gets very vague. The next king is probably Sekhemkhet – evidence of his existence includes more inscriptions in the Sinai, but the primary evidence is from his unfinished pyramid at Saqqara. This was supposed to be another Step Pyramid like Djoser's but it was abandoned after a short time. It appears to have been used, and an alabaster sarcophagus was found within (although his body had long since vanished). Other finds include gold bangles, and offering lists.

One source of the confusion surrounding the kings of this dynasty is that the various kings list don't even agree on how many kings, let alone who they were. Manetho gives 8 names, but none of the New Kingdom ones give more than 5 (but remember they are also more than a thousand years after the kings they purportedly record).

The order of the kings is also confused and inconsistent between lists. And there is another king called "missing" in some lists which just casts further doubt on the accuracy of the information these scribes were working from!

The probable successor to Sekhemkhet is a king called Sanakhte, who again is depicted in the Sinai. The location of his tomb is unknown but Dodson speculates that it is at Abu Roash (north of Saqqara, and north of the later Giza necropolis). At this site there are the remains of another big mudbrick enclosure and inside it there is some sort of mudbrick structure which might have once been a pyramid. This is all rather speculative, but given that rectangular enclosures are no longer constructed after the 3rd Dynasty it must be 3rd Dynasty. And Dodson says that Sanakhte is a good guess!

There is another pyramid, called the Layer Pyramid, at Zawiyet el Aryan, which has no name associated with it but Dodson thinks that it may belong to Khaba as the next king in the dynasty. The evidence for this hinges round pottery vessels found nearby which have Khaba's name on them, and the plan of the pyramid which suggests a 3rd Dynasty date.

The end of the 3rd Dynasty gets a little less problematic – various sources (although not all) indicate that the last king was called Huni. And it's possible that a plaque in the Louvre with the Horus name Qahedjet might also be this king. It's during this period that cartouches are beginning to be used, and that the main name used for a king is transitioning from the Horus name to the *nesu bity* name. So it's harder to be certain if these two names refer to the same king or not. Dodson said that we don't know where Huni's tomb is, either but he speculates that the mudbrick pyramid at Abu Roash might belong to him. It was built around a rock core, and if it had been finished it would have been as big as Khafre's pyramid! There are no names associated with it, but in terms of style it has to be not long before Sneferu (and the 4th Dynasty) so Dodson thinks Huni is most plausible. A lot of books claim that the Meidum pyramid belonged to Huni and was finished by Sneferu, but Dodson said there's absolutely no evidence to back this up – it's just that no tomb is known for Huni so why not this one. But he thinks the pyramid at Abu Roash is a much better candidate.

Dodson wrapped up his talk by looking at what changes as we transition into the 4th Dynasty with Sneferu, and why this makes a good stopping place for his discussion of "the first pharaohs". There is quite a clear break – before Sneferu we have breaks in our knowledge of the royal succession and we really don't know very much about the royal officials. From Sneferu's reign onward we have knowledge of an almost unbroken line for the rest of Egyptian history and there are tombs for large numbers of the royal officials. There seems to be a significant transition point here, marking a new start in many ways – it's not clear why, but it makes a good place to leave behind the early kings.

This was a really interesting talk and overview of a period I find particularly fascinating, it's where the foundations of all the later Egyptian civilisation were laid but the history is so murky. Dodson took us through what we know, and why we know it – and just how many gaps there actually are in our knowledge. But I think the part that's going to stick with me most is the little detail that the Egyptians themselves knew so little about this history that a scribe could mistake "missing" for the name of a king when making out a king list! A very human touch, and a reminder of just how long a period Egyptian civilisation lasted for.